E601
.M68

01
3
, 1

Military Order

of the

Loyal Legion

of the

United States.

COMMANDERY OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.

WAR PAPER 92.

My Three Recruits.

.M68

My Three Recruits.

Our two companies, A and B, of the McClellan Dragoons, during the second year of the war, were attached to the 1st and later to the 2d U. S. Cavalry.

We were with the regulars in all about a year, and although at the time we thought we were imposed upon for guard and other duties, yet withal we learned so much from them that was useful and valuable that when later we became part and parcel of the 12th Illinois Cavalry, we felt we had a much higher military standing than other companies who had not been given equal opportunities.

So when, in the winter of '63 and '64, the 12th went home to Chicago to recruit as veterans, I was not surprised that my company rapidly filled its quota, even with a third more than could be taken upon its rolls.

One morning while sitting in my tent at Camp Fry, then on the outskirts of the city, several miles beyond its limits, three large, fine looking, soldierly appearing men were shown in by my orderly. They were such men as would delight the heart of any recruiting officer, for they were straight, respectful in manner, without being in the least obsequious, and bearing no marks of the slightest signs of any kind of dissipation.

The spokesman, Grant, saluting, asked, "Is this the captain of Co. I? Answering in the affirmative, he added, "We have come to join your company." "But, my dear man," I said, "my company is full to overflowing. The colonel told me this morning, that I had promised far more than I could fulfil, and that I must face the unpleasant alternative of choosing about 25 of the men who must go to some of the other companies."

"That settles it, then; we can't enlist," said Grant, as they started to leave the tent.

The third and last man in line was Alvord, about six feet two inches, splendidly built, strong of frame, yet as light moving as the mountaineer he was, and I quickly thought there hadn't been three such desirable recruits offered to any company in the entire regiment, perhaps to any regiment. "Hold a moment," I said, "you don't know how I hate to have three such fellows as you appear to be go to any other company, but Company H of my old squadron is much like mine, for we each had the advantage of being with the regulars for a year. Let me take you over to his tent and introduce you to Captain Conroe." "No, sir," again answered Grant, "it's Company I or none. We've heard all about you and your company, and if you can't take us, we'll go home. We're bushwackers, and I reckon we can perhaps settle some more of our old scores before the fighting stops."

I told them to sit down a moment until I could talk with my colonel and see if I could not arrange it in some way. Informing him of the situation, I asked the colonel if he would not walk over to my tent and see if my judgment was correct, to which he gave ready acquiescence. After a very few moments' conversation, the colonel told me to let go whoever I must, but keep these three in my company, with the result that they eventually became members thereof to our mutual satisfaction.

A fortnight later, smallpox broke out among the soldiers and our regiment suffered greatly. I visited the men in their quarters, morning and night, for nearly every day new cases appeared. In making the rounds one morning, I found Alvord in bed. "What's the matter?" I asked. "I don't know," he answered, "my throat is sore and my head aches, but I think it's only a slight cold. I'm not accustomed to acting this way."

I called the doctor, who was at the other end of the barracks, who, after examining Alvord's throat and asking a few questions,

told me to get him to the pest-house in the quickest possible time, for it was the worst case he had seen. I heard from him from time to time and, as there were no fatalities in our regiment, hoped he might be able to rejoin us before we left the city.

In March we were ordered south and after remaining in St. Louis about a month, and drawing our horses, proceeded down the Mississippi to New Orleans.

The morning we left Chicago, Alvord reported for duty. He looked wretched, all shriveled up and bowed over like a little old man, bearing not the slightest resemblance to my splendid six-foot recruit of the January previous. In answer to my question, if he was not taking big chances for a relapse, he said "he couldn't help it, he didn't enlist to lie in a hospital." But the relapse came at once and he *did* lie in a hospital all the while we were in St. Louis. On the first of April, the beautiful boat *Pauline Carrol* landed our company in New Orleans. It was put at once on provost duty below the city and I had no further knowledge of my sick man, until one morning I received a note from a kind-hearted nurse, who wrote me at the request of one of her patients, Alvord, who was dangerously ill. Receiving permission from the major in command, I rode at once to the city and called at the hospital, and sent my name to the nurse.

It was the old story, only too true: Alvord was dying, most of the time delirious, but trying to live a little longer until he could see his captain.

There was nothing to do. It was the hand of a little, withered old man which I clasped, seemingly over a foot shorter than the broad-shouldered young giant I recruited, and with the dampness of death upon his forehead. I remained with him several hours, took the name of his sister, his only living representative, from whom I later received a very appreciative note. I did all in my power to render his last hours free from pain and suffering. It seemed to relieve his mind greatly to learn that I believed

he had given his life for his country just as truly as if he had participated in a hundred battles.

During the summer, while stationed with my company at one of the famous cotton presses, Grant was reported on the sick list. After guard mount I went to his bunk. Nothing appeared to be the matter, and as he had often told me that he never had a sick day since his childhood and had always lived a rough-and-tumble life, I was astonished to hear him say, "Well, Captain, I guess I've got it." "Got what?" I asked. "The last call." "Last fiddlestick," I said, "why, you've told me time and again that you never knew what it was to be sick. However, I'll send the doctor around and you had better keep quiet for a day or two for we always have more or less malaria in this city." "Yes, I know I have no pain, but I reckon within twenty-four hours I'll see my old pard Alvord, and I'll tell him you often spoke of him and regretted that he had to leave us so soon."

The doctor agreed with me that there was nothing the matter with Grant, so far as he could see, but stated he had given him something to quiet his nerves, and that when he left him he was resting easily and dozing. The man detailed to watch by him during the night called me just before daybreak and reported that Grant had raised himself in his bunk, crying, "I'm coming, old pard," and had fallen back unconscious.

When I reached him he was dead. No one new from whence he came, for he had never told any of us, or anything about any of his relations, but we laid him side by side with Alvord in the old graveyard, where the waving tendrils of the Spanish moss sings its requiem for many another of the long ago.

The fall of 1864 found us stationed on the Bayou La Fourche, in Louisiana. My third recruit, Meade, had proved to be a good soldier, always neat and trim in appearance, ready and willing for any duty, and seemingly without fear. He was a good deal better educated than his two friends, and I had made him a corporal and had even considered his name for a sergeancy.

One evening my orderly sergeant came to my tent asking if he couldn't "tell me something in confidence." I said "certainly" and he told me in detail that it was about Meade, a man whom I had always seemed to like, and of whom he did not wish to make any unjust charge. He was, however, having a whole lot of trouble with him; that every few days he reported on the sick list, although the doctor said he was not sick; that nothing was the matter with him but sheer laziness; that he was dirty and slovenly in his habits (which, by the way, I had already noticed, as it was so contrary to his former self), and that his tent-mates complained he constantly shirked his share of the necessary work.

I took occasion to inspect his quarters the following day, found the complaints fully justified and sent for him to report to me. He came, slouched into my tent and, without saluting, sank down into a chair. "Meade," I said, rather sharply, "what is the matter with you? My personal attention has been called to a good many of your shortcomings of late, and while you know I have always been very friendly to you and do not desire you should consider even this talk in the light of a reprimand, I must ask you to explain the reason of this remarkable change. For a year or more after you and your friends joined Company I, in Chicago, you were quite my ideal of a volunteer soldier. You were neat, attentive to your duties and ready for any kind of detail. I accordingly promoted you, and had considered your name for still higher honors. But of late, however, there has been a great change for the worse. You are no longer neat or tidy in your dress or in your equipments, and yesterday I found your tent in a horribly mussy condition. The doctor states he can see no reason why you should report yourself on the sick list, as you so frequently do; that he can find nothing whatever the matter with you, and that it must be the result of laziness. If you are really sick, I will have you sent to the

hospital and properly cared for, but I think what you really need is to regain some of your old-time ambition.

"I will tell you confidentially, not as your captain, but as your old friend, that to-morrow I start with 35 picked men, on an important scout, away up in the Bayou Teche country. It is infested with guerrillas, away from all communication and where we will find, at least, plenty of exceitment. If you feel well enough, I want you to be of the party. We've been in some pretty tight places before, and I want men around me on whom I can rely. Will you accept the detail?" He said he thought he would, thanked me as he left my tent, but, I afterwards recalled, gave no promise of reformation. Upon the next afternoon when the order was quietly passed around by word of mouth for my chosen squad to assemble, the sergeant reported that Meade was sick in bed, and had requested to see me for a moment. I shall always remember that last interview. As it turned out, it was almost like talking with one already on the other shore. "Captain," he said, as I entered, "I didn't want to leave you without telling you that I appreciate all your kindnesses and all you've done for me. I know I've not been a good soldier lately, but I wish you would shake hands with me. Good-bye."

I took him by his hands, which seemed cold and clammy, and said as heartily as I could, "That's all right; of course I'll shake hands with you, but it's only a little, short good-bye for a week or two. I certainly don't intend to be killed this trip and I hope on my return to find you all right again and ready to be your old self for the few remaining months the war will last." "Perhaps," he said, "perhaps, but my old chums are calling for me mighty loud."

When I returned to camp, after a very successful raid of about ten days, I learned that in the early morning of the next day after my departure Meade raised himself to a sitting posture, crying out, "Alvord, Grant," and fell over dead.

Did my three recruits meet together on that other shore as the bright, brave, loyal comrades they were when they came to me and said "Company I, or none," and did I as their captain fail in any way to make their short enlistment a happy one, or one of which they can proudly speak, as they meet and recount the old, old story?

Oh, our captain! Heaven protect you,
Till the muster out shall come,
When we'll give the same glad greeting,
"Brave old Company I or none."

When you come you'll find us standing,
Talking of the days of yore,
Touching elbows, still saluting,
Waiting on this farther shore.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
0 013 763 487 9